

BILL: Senate Bill 564
TITLE: Education - High School Graduation Requirements - Students in Foster Care or Homeless Youth
DATE: February 18, 2020
POSITION: SUPPORT WITH AMENDMENTS
COMMITTEE: Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee
CONTACT: John R. Woolums, Esq.

The Maryland Association of Boards of Education (MABE) supports the intent and implementation of this bill, with one amendment.

This bill would require a local board of education to waive high school graduation requirements established by the local board that are in addition to the high school graduation requirements established by the State Board of Education for a student in foster care or who is a homeless youth. The bill would limit this required exemption from any additional local requirements to students who transfer between school systems, or between schools within a school system, in the 11th or 12th grade.

MABE appreciates the intent of this bill and the need to address negative educational outcomes for students in foster care or who are homeless and whose mobility between school systems impedes their eligibility for graduation and the Maryland State Diploma. However, MABE does not support extending the same exemption to all homeless and foster care students regardless of whether they have moved between school systems.

Federal law and state regulations require that school systems provide homeless children and youth with access to the education and other services that they need to ensure that they have an opportunity to meet the same challenging State student academic achievement standards to which all students are held. Further, homeless children and youth, while receiving a free public education, may not be segregated in a separate school or in a separate program within a school, based on their status as homeless and must be educated as part of a school's regular academic program (COMAR 13A.05.09.01).

Therefore, MABE requests the following amendment to remove the reference to transfers between schools within the same school system. On page 2, strike beginning "OR" in line 32 through line 2 on page 3.

Local boards of education certainly recognizes the negative impact of mobility of 11th and 12th graders between school systems with different high school graduation requirements and does not believe this bill conflicts with the general principle that homeless students remain subject to the same state graduation standards.

For these reasons, MABE requests a favorable report on Senate Bill 564 with the amendment described above.